

City leaders: failure of stormwater bond not end of discussion

Bond:

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Transcript Staff

Tuesday's election demonstrated Normanites' deep reservations about funding and maintaining stormwater projects via a bond and utility fee.

Proposition 2, a \$60 million bond that would have funded 33 stormwater projects throughout the city, was rejected 7,286 votes (57.39 percent) to 5,810 votes (42.61 percent). Breaking down votes by ward is even more telling: Prop 2 failed in all but Ward 3 (1,472 yes votes to 1,444 no votes), Ward 4 (748 yes votes to 557 no votes) and Ward 7 (220 yes votes to 187 no votes).

It was roundly rejected by east Norman: Ward 5 residents voted against the proposition at an almost 83 percent clip (2,017 no votes to 417 yes votes), and it struggled in Ward 6 (1,221 no votes to 867 yes votes) and Ward 8 (1,033 no votes to 801 yes votes) as well.

Proposition 3, a stormwater utility, was even less popular. On Tuesday, the utility lost 8,220 votes to 5,406. Only Ward 3 (692 yes votes to 612 no votes) and Ward 7 (205 yes votes to 201 no votes) went

See **BOND** Page A2 **CITY** "We will continue working on green initiatives and initiating policies that will help us address our stormwater issue as much as we can without proper funding."

Breea Clark, Mayor-elect

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From **Page A1** for Prop 3, and even then by a small margin. In Ward 5, 84 percent of votes (2,045) and in Ward 6 60 percent of votes (1,258) were "no" votes. It marked the second time in three years that Norman voters rejected a stormwater utility.

Conversely, Proposition 1, a \$72 million transportation bond, received widespread support, garnering at least 65 percent of the vote in every ward save Ward 5 (where it garnered 1,221 yes votes to 1,214 against) and passing 9,068 votes (66.27 percent) to 4,601 (33.73 percent).

While the votes were not there for the stormwater propositions, city leaders said the topic remains a pressing one. Mayor-elect Breea Clark, who will officially become mayor in July when Lynne Miller's term ends, echoed her predecessor's sentiment that the issue will have to be brought back to council members and residents.

"While we made progress with educating voters and getting support, the propositions that would have helped to address our stormwater needs failed," Clark said. "We've also had bridges fail, significant property damage from flooding, and HOAs and neighborhoods request help with major stormwater infrastructure improvements, and I am disappointed that we will be unable to provide funding support to address these issues."

“At this time, I’m not sure when we will revisit a stormwater utility and/or bond issue, but I know that we will. We have to.”

Immediately following Tuesday night’s vote, Miller said there is no question the council and the city will have to revisit the issue, again. Officials have known for 10 years what needs to be addressed and the city does not have enough money to take care of it, she added.

Clark said the council will have to work with the city manager “to cut our already lean budget” in the meantime.

“I look forward to hearing from community members on what areas they would like to trim down,” she said. “We will continue working on green initiatives and initiating policies that will help us address our stormwater issue as much as we can without proper funding. Please be mindful with your grass trimmings as we approach spring and summer. That’s about all an individual can do to help with stormwater quality. In terms of the millions of dollars of infrastructure improvements that would have benefitted residents all over Norman, it looks like they will have to wait.”

Clark said she was pleased to see Proposition 1, the transportation bond, passed by voters. The \$72 million bond will fund 19 projects, including the widening of 24th Avenue NE and Tecumseh.

Miller said all of the projects identified are important for Norman’s transportation needs. In addition, the passage of Proposition 1 will be helpful in the future, as it will enable Norman to vie for grant money and federal dollars for transportation infrastructure.

“When you’re competing for funds, statewide, it’s important your citizens are stepping up and saying, ‘We’ll put this money toward these projects,’” Miller said. “So it’s critical to what we get in terms of federal funding.”